

Pastor Michael's Sermon from July 17, 2016
"The Slide Show" – The Conclusion of "The Story"

Remember the last time you took a road trip? Gone off on a journey, travelled for a holiday? Maybe it was out West to the Grand Canyon, or a flight to Hawaii. Maybe it was to the shore with the family. Our cousins have just journeyed from San Jose, California to New Jersey and are here today.

One of the things you probably did was take photographs. Years ago it was on film and you had an album. Today it is digital. I'll bet what you did when you got home was to look through the pictures and reminisce about your trip.

Well, we have taken a trip this year at church – we made a journey through the Bible using "The Story." Genesis to Revelation. What we tried to do was to get the big picture – to get a bird's eye view of the Bible and see throughout history from cover to cover. We saw what humans were doing - what we called the lower story – usually messing things up – and at the same time to see what God was up to – what we called the upper story – His grand plan of salvation; its history laid out in the Bible.

What I'd like to do is have you imagine some of those snapshots on our journey through the Bible, now that our journey is completed. Let's begin at the beginning of the drive: "In the beginning" the Bible starts off. Imagine your photographs. Here's a snapshot of the first sunrise – and there are the oceans – and the coastline. Here's one of the sky at night *before the days of pollution*. Can you picture the infinity of the Universe? Sure. God was at work – where are we? Ah yes, Genesis Chapter 1 – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said that it was good." Not an accident, not a random happening, but God's plan – the upper story. Ah, family portrait time – there are Adam and Eve walking in the garden hand in hand. How do you like that, our first parents. And it was God who made them, who created humanity. We read about that: Genesis 1:27 - "*So God created mankind in his own image. In his own image he created them. Male and female he created them.*" No chance happening here. We were created intentionally; created by God – created with a purpose and meaning – to know, love and serve the Lord and to be happy with him in the next. Think about it – we were made to love God our Maker.

We move on. What's this? It's a picture of a tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – but where are Adam and Eve? Not here anymore – not in the Garden of Eden. Sin has entered the world – we have a broken relationship with God. Satan said "*eat this fruit and you will be like God.*" Remember Hitler? Remember Stalin? But know this: the rest of the journey is about God trying to get us back. Trying to get human beings into a loving relationship with him. Trying to redeem them.

Here's the next shot. It is kind of a cruise ship – but no, it's Noah's Ark. Adam and Eve's descendants weren't doing well – they started with Cain killing his brother Abel. And then: Genesis 6:5 – *“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only on evil all the time. God regretted he made human beings in the first place.”* But look, here is Noah – who what? Who found favor in God's eyes. And Noah gathered his family and the animals of the earth – male and female – on the ark. And what happened? The rains came, 40 days and 40 nights, and the earth was destroyed by water. But God had made a covenant with Noah – be fruitful and multiply, increase and fill the earth. And God made a promise to Noah – he would never destroy the earth again by water – and wow, look at the rainbow in this picture. What's the point? You see God here made a promise to all humanity. He blessed all humanity – after all, they were made in the image of God. He gave them each a conscience, a sense of right and wrong, a responsibility of caring for the earth – he gave us reason and a soul – each one made in the image of God. No matter what race, tribe or religion – God is the Father of us all, all children of Noah. That's what the covenant, the promise to Noah is all about. We are all children of God.

Well, centuries pass and who do we have here in the photograph? Remember this journey? Abraham and Sarah – God led them away from the land of Ur and the gods they worshipped and told Abraham and Sarah they would go to a promised land – and *they would be the parents of many more than the stars you can see in the heavens or grains of sand at the sea.* And their descendants would be a special people. Not because they were strong and powerful but because they knew the One True God by God's revelation, and they would be called the Hebrew people – people God chose among all the tribes of the earth to know the living God. Why? *To be a light to the nations.* In time, God even sent Moses, who received the law of God – the 10 Commandments – so they would know how to *live a life pleasing to God.* and the sum of those laws (1) to love God with your whole mind, and strength and soul and (2) “to love your neighbor as yourself.” In fact, here's a picture of Moses coming down from the mountain holding the stone tablets. He looks a little like Charlton Heston. Do you see the upper story? God's plan unfolding. A new covenant, a deepening relationship with God.

Our journey goes on – and we see centuries pass and the people know the law – but they don't keep the law. Even their kings like Ahab, who married Jezebel, broke God's laws and prayed to fake gods – like Baal. Of course, there are always exceptions. Yes, there was a good boy identified by the prophet Samuel to one day be king – his name David, the youngest of his brothers. And you know the stories of David: His battle with Goliath, his shepherding, his playing the harp for King Saul, his sin with Bathsheba, his repentance, his Psalms. Not a perfect man – just one who loved God and sought forgiveness. “A man after God's own heart,” the Bible says. Think of Michelangelo's statue of the young David. A King whom the Lord promised an “eternal dynasty.” 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17; Psalm 132 – The promise of a new covenant. And it was from the line of David that the Messiah was to come. A new promise from God – a redeemer, to save his people from their sins. A series of covenants with God, second chances, if you will – Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and lastly Jesus Christ.

A thousand years go by and Jesus is born. And now we have not just the law, but God with us in Jesus Christ, who came not just for the Jews, the children of Abraham, but to all the descendants of Noah – the whole human race: “God so loved the world that he sent his son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.” We remember - his death on the cross. As Paul says in Romans 18, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” The final covenant – a relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

Just like Adam and Eve, who walked in the Garden of Eden, when we receive Christ into our lives we too walk as new people with God - forgiven and made new. Have you received Jesus’ forgiveness of sin? And as Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning, so too those in Christ will rise from the dead to new and eternal life. Revelation 21 – And when he comes back again at the end of time as he promised, there will be a new heaven and a new earth – a new Eden where Jesus is Lord. A heavenly Kingdom.

And there it is – a quick look – a review of our magnificent journey through the Bible.

What did you learn over these months through your reading and listening and wrestling with the word? How has your relationship with Christ grown in your life experience over the year...? What do you know? Here’s a selfie, the last picture, a picture of you as you continue on life’s journey with God.